



SAFELY HANDLING

SCAFFOLDING BOARDS

Did you know that over 25% of injuries reported by scaffolders each year are related to poor manual handling?

According to the NASC Accident Statistics, manual handling is the biggest hazard within the scaffolding industry. The typical injuries reported are sprains, strains and broken bones.

Although life-changing and fatal accidents related to manual handling are rare, they do happen!

That's why it's so important that you and your employees are well practised in the most safe and effective lifting techniques to minimise any potential injuries.



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MANUAL HANDLING RISKS

One of the main sources of personal injury for Scaffolders is from incorrectly lifting, carrying and moving equipment or materials.

So, what makes manual handling such a risky business? Well, there are a few different aspects to consider when assessing the risks. It isn't always as straightforward as it would appear and scaffolding tasks across multiple sites could mean new, unique risks that need to be considered at each one.

Manually handling scaffolding boards is something we can't get away from. It comes with the job, but how we approach it and deal with the risks is important.

When assessing the risks, you always need to remember the acronym LITE (Load, Individual, Task, and Environment). You might also see this referred to as 'TILE' but either is correct when carrying out a health and safety risk assessment.

We highly recommend using equipment, such as pulleys, when you need to move scaffolding boards around on site. When that is not possible, following the LITE manual handling risk assessment will help keep everyone safe.

'LITE' RISK GUIDE

The Load

The weight, shape and stability of the load being lifted contribute to the amount of control and effort that is needed to safely handle it. This especially needs to be taken into consideration when lifting long scaffolding boards vertically. You need to consider if an individual will be able to safely lift the load alone or whether additional lifting equipment, needs to be considered.

The Task

What kind of lifting will be involved? Does the individual need to reach, bend, twist or stretch whilst carrying the load? It's important to consider the load's position in relation to the handler to understand how much effort will be needed to safely complete the task. For example, if the load needs to be lifted above head height, this will require considerably more control and effort than the same lift at waist height.

The Individual

How much is one person able to safely handle? Well, there is no definite answer to this because it all depends on the age, strength and experience of the individual. Has the individual had training in safe manual handling techniques? Is more than one person needed to carry the load to increase comfort and safety?

The Environment

Weather, temperature and terrain all affect how manual handling will be carried out. Has the area been cleared of any obstacles and trip hazards? Is there sufficient lighting? For long lifts, we suggest having a table or bench ready to rest along the route and changing grip if needed. Also, if the weather is extremely cold or rainy, there could be poor ground conditions due to frost or mud, which hugely increases the likelihood of slipping.

KINETIC LIFTING TECHNIQUES

When we are on a site, about to pick up a scaffold board, one of the last things we sometimes think about is "How am I going to pick this up?"

To protect yourself and your team from injury, we would always recommend following kinetic lifting techniques, which allow for the safe and comfortable handling of scaffolding boards (or any other load).

So, what exactly is kinetic lifting?

Kinetic lifting focuses on making full use of body weight and momentum to initiate the lift and utilises thigh muscles to carry the weight of the load. This type of lifting requires the least amount of effort and avoids putting any stress or strain on the spine.

This all sounds very general so let's break it down into sections to make it a lot easier to understand. To do this, let's look at what needs to happen with each part of your body going from bottom to top.

Your Feet

It's essential that any lifting is always carried out on stable ground – avoid slippery surfaces as this is an accident waiting to happen! In terms of placement, your feet should be in a comfortable position, shoulder width apart with one foot slightly in front of the other. For added stability, your rear foot should be pointed in the direction you intend to move whilst carrying the load. You should also be wearing suitable shoes with decent grip.

Your Back

If your back is bent during the lift, it puts unnecessary pressure on all the wrong places. Remember, when lifting, a straight back is a strong back! Focus on keeping your back straight throughout every part of the lift, even when you're bending over to pick up the load.

Your Grip

Perhaps one of the most important pieces of PPE when it comes to carrying scaffolding, you need to ensure that you have suitable strong-grip gloves. It's helpful to have specially designed gloves for Scaffolding with extra grip and dexterity.

Your Legs

Your legs will be doing the heavy lifting for you, so both your knees should be untensed and unlocked to allow you to automatically adjust your feet to the most stable and comfortable position during the lift. You should NEVER go into a full squat whilst lifting as this puts huge pressure on your knee joints. Your rear leg needs to be positioned to provide thrust for the lift after you've bent down to pick it up to minimise any strain on your back.

Your Arms

Keep the load close to your body for as long as possible whilst lifting. The more you extend your arms, the more strain you put on your shoulders and back. For more support, you can also tuck your elbows in close to your body.

Your Head

Here's something you might not have thought of when lifting – the placement of your head. It should be slightly raised with your chin pushed back. Doing this straightens your neck, and thus your spine, lifting your chest and putting your arms in the best possible position for lifting.

HANDLING SCAFFOLDING BOARDS

Now we have covered the basics, let's drill down into the specifics of the best way to safely handle scaffolding boards.

Although the majority of sprains and strains come from incorrectly lifting heavy and awkward scaffolding poles, injuries also do happen whilst carrying scaffolding boards!

This could be due to the varying weight of scaffolding boards; the moisture content will influence the weight of the load and how many can be comfortably carried. This could vary between morning and afternoon if there's heavy enough rainfall, so it's always good to be hypervigilant of your surroundings.

We always recommend ensuring that you and your team use safety equipment wherever possible. There is a large range of tools and equipment available to help you move and lift scaffold boards.

You can find some of our most popular products for safely lifting scaffold boards on page 10.

Lifting Scaffolding Boards

- First, approach the board squarely, facing the direction you want to move in.
- Firmly grasp the end of the board and - as highlighted in our previous kinetic lifting techniques - use your back leg to provide thrust to lift the board to waist height (remembering to keep that back nice and straight!).
- Feed the board over your preferred shoulder hand-over-hand – we usually recommend the shoulder closest to your dominant hand – but keep the other end of the board on the ground until you reach the board's centre point.
- Lift the board onto your shoulder and then feed it back a bit so it's slightly off-centre with most of the weight behind you.
- Place your closest arm around the board to steady it and you're ready to move!

Up-righting Scaffolding Boards

To feed long scaffolding boards up a scaffold, the board must be placed upright. We recommend that boards are only placed like this if they are going to be imminently lifted – otherwise you could run the risk of people knocking into it and causing an accident.

Moving from a carrying position (standing upright with a straight back), feed the front-end of the board hand-over-hand until it's on the ground. Use your arms to push the board off your shoulder until it's vertical and rest it against the scaffold.

This part is very important - ensure that the board is at a slight angle so there is no risk of it falling back onto you and rest it against either a corner or a protruding transom to prevent it sliding around and falling on someone else.

Following the earlier LITE guide can help you stay safe while up-righting scaffolding boards.

Short Scaffolding Boards

When moving short scaffolding boards from one place to another, we recommend that you don't carry more than three at any one time. You might be tempted to think you can save time carrying more, or that lifting 3 boards is a walk in the park, but this considerably reduces grip and it's never worth increasing risk over minor benefits.

The method for lifting short boards is very similar to long boards but with one significant difference; instead of grabbing the end of the boards and feeding them over your shoulder, find the centre point of the boards you want to lift and bend down so your preferred shoulder lowers to meet this point.

With a firm grip around the boards, pull them into your shoulder at an angle and then lift by pushing up with your back leg so you're in a standing position. Once again, place the boards on your shoulder slightly off the centre of gravity point with the majority of the weight behind you. Use both hands with a firm grasp to steady the boards.

10 Essential Lifting Techniques

1. Think before handling and plan the lift.
2. Adopt a stable lifting position using kinetic lifting techniques.
3. Get a good hold on the load.
4. Maintain good posture and don't bend your back whilst lifting.
5. Keep the load close to your waist to minimise strain.
6. Avoid twisting or leaning sideways during the lift.
7. Keep your head up and look where you're going to spot hazards.
8. Use slow, controlled movements and avoid jerking or snatching.
9. Don't lift more than you're comfortable with and if in doubt, ask for help.
10. Don't be afraid to put the load down and adjust if it becomes uncomfortable.

TOOLS & ACCESSORIES



BIGBEN® Scaffold Board Lifter

The fastest and safest way to lift scaffold boards. Simply slip over the ends of 1-3 boards, pull it tight and lift away.



BIGBEN® Crane Tag Line & Hook

Featuring a double action safety latch, heavy-duty swivel hook and designed to help you safely control loads being lifted.



Certificated Gin Wheel

A fully certified gin wheel, tested to 1000kg and able to lift 250kg. A reliable tool to help all scaffolders lift scaffold boards.



BIGBEN® 2m Tall Scaffold Lifting Bag

With a safe working load of 100kg, this heavy-duty and durable bag is the ideal tool to help safely raise or lower boards.



BIGBEN® Duplex Lifting Sling

A durable and strong lifting sling that you can trust. Certified 3 tonne sling that is available in a range of sizes.



BIGBEN® Controlled Safety Pulley

Award winning design that ensures the safe raising and lowering of boards. A must have for every work site.



SecurPulley Auto Braking Gin Wheel

This gin wheel comes with an automated brake that is designed to help reduce the number of pulley accidents.



18mm Certified Polypropylene Rope

A trustworthy rope with a 220m reel that conforms to BS EN ISO 1346:2012. Can be used with a range of accessories and tools.

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